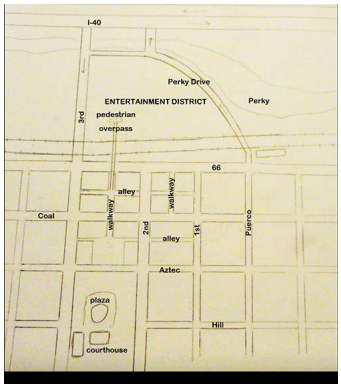
Written by By Joe Schaller
Friday, 27 November 2015 07:07



A Master Developer Agreement for an Entertainment District

In past years I have written about the untapped potential in the heart of Gallup, so with recent interest in the north-tracks district expressed by a Downtown Redevelopment Plan it bears repeating.

In part one I talked about the city's notion that they can solve the economic woes of downtown Gallup. Aside from enhancing street and pedestrian infrastructure and then asking the property owners how they can make life easier for them by reducing regulations and providing incentives, there's not much else they can do. More open spaces with additional pedestrian walkway mall areas and expanded parking would certainly enhance the experience however the key to future success in the downtown district will depend on major private sector development north of the railroad tracks which can truly be considered the heart of town as viewed from the freeway. The freeway completion in the 1970s was to the detriment of many bypassed communities however Gallup, with its downtown area visible from the elevated highway, was granted a gift to capitalize on. Yet forty years later the view of the heart of town is still an eyesore.

Gallup Land Partners, an outsider family, has done what nobody else in our region full of millionaires had the vision or will to do, take the investment risk of purchasing the Gamerco Associates properties with plans of creating an industrial hub complete with a railroad spur. With the proper incentives and infrastructure improvements the land purchase in the heart of Gallup might also be appealing to investors, and I mean an Entertainment District development on a large scale. Once that is in place it becomes a facilitator for an Arts and Cultural District in old

downtown. Step one needs to be the appropriate infrastructure upgrade by the city in order to attract developer/investors.

I have heard some fascinating infrastructure ideas for downtown however not many are realistic. These included such things as a street tunnel underpass, a massive complex and expensive project, or moving a stretch of the railroad closer to the freeway – not gonna happen. The intentions are to tie in the railroad-freeway district with downtown by removing obstacles. As far as I can see though only one alteration of a smaller scale should be necessary, a relocation of the Second Street railroad crossing to either First or preferably Puerco with a new street curving along the Perky (Perky Drive) to connect with the Second Street bridge and Third Street. The east-west Maxwell Avenue would be removed so Perky Drive could run along the Perky Wash bank. This would open up considerably more unobstructed area for development, creating an area larger than four city blocks. Taking it a step further would be an extension of Perky Drive from Third Street to a new railroad crossing at Fifth Street allowing the removal of the Third Street crossing and even more area for not only Entertainment District development but residential as well. Perky Drive would function well as a two-way street with the Second and Third Street underpasses remaining one-way.

At this point the investor-developers could step in facilitated by a Master Developer Agreement allowing the garnered funds of the Downtown Redevelopment Plan to be transferred to those developers. Offering the city owned land on the cheap would also be an incentive to developers with the city receiving a return on their ‘investment’ from property, sales and lodgers taxes. Later on the downtown landowners might collaborate to create a walkway mall connecting Coal and 66. That would allow the second infrastructure addition by government entities - a sensational eye-catching neon-lit pedestrian overpass as a downtown centerpiece linking ‘old downtown’ to my proposed Entertainment District. The possibilities are enormous and I offer to you what I have envisioned for nearly 40 years.

First of all I see an upscale Entertainment District with an old town flavor featuring open areas comparable to Albuquerque and Santa Fe old town districts – open areas which are so lacking in the confines of downtown Gallup. El Rancho Grande Hotel would be located on the east side off ‘Perky Drive’ with a three star restaurant row to the west bordering Third Street. The Grande Hotel and Convention Center might include their own Indian Market Plaza with gazebo in the central area and easy access to the downtown pedestrian overpass. Plenty of parking would be available along the railroad right-of-way and near the overpass. North of and facing the central plaza could be an outdoor concert arena. The district outer perimeter could include an IMAX theatre, bowling alley, shuffleboard club, roller coaster and a Giddy Up Gallup western dance hall in the old A G Cash & Carry - I’m just postulating on a myriad of possibilities for a very large area, all to be determined by private sector developers with a profit motive, a motivation which public projects lack, with the consequence of such ill-advised schemes as our hidden

Courthouse Square.

With 20,000 vehicles passing by daily on I-40 looking down on a modern ‘old town’ hub of activity and carnival atmosphere complete with a mega retro-neon and digital billboard, the image of Gallup would be immediately upgraded and downtown an actual destination for many.

Schaller’s postulate #7 states “The private sector does it twice as good at half the cost and half the time.” You can have all your government BID, MRA, ACD, COC, EDC as well as city planners-zoners cooking up 10-year strategies ad infinitum to haphazardly recreate downtown at great expense to taxpayers, yet in the end it all comes down to the landowners, private developers and investors with the City of Gallup assisting thru infrastructure upgrades and a Master Developer Agreement. Will there be a vision, initiative and will to take a few risks in order to hit that mother lode which lies hidden in the heart of Gallup, yet in plain sight from that busy freeway?